

PRESS CLIPPINGS

Office of Program Resources Management

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STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #12 (SO12)

(Conflict Reduced in Mindanao and Other Areas Vulnerable to Violence)

Cotabato City: Ready for takeoff

(Source: Philippine Star, 2/5/06, page 16)

This city is ready to take off.

Cotabato City businessman Pete Marquez has called on his colleagues in the city's business community to work with the local government to achieve the dream of a progressive, business-friendly and peaceful city.

"Cotabato City was once considered the premier trading post in Mindanao. It is time to reclaim that lost glory," Marquez said at the recent Cotabato Business Conference.

The conference was attended by over 200 local entrepreneurs, represen-

tatives from non-government organizations and the government.

Marquez said changing the mindset of business leaders is a good first step in reinventing the image of Cotabato City, which is better known as a political hotspot than as a viable trade and investment center.

"There is really a need for a paradigm shift among members of the local business community," he said. Marquez is a Cotabato native who once worked in Los Angeles as a real estate broker.

He said there was a time when the city

was poised to become one of Mindanao's premier trading centers because of its strategic location and rich natural resources. This potential remained unrealized when armed conflict erupted there in the 1970s.

"It's about time local business people take the lead and become the city's ambassadors of goodwill," said Marquez, who is also the president of the Metro Cotabato Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCCI).

The MCCCI, which receives financial and technical assistance from the US-

AID-funded Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM) program, is at the forefront of initiatives to create a better business climate in the city.

He said Cotabato businessmen should promote the city as a viable business destination during their business trips to help the local government attract new investments in the city.

Development planners are also preparing for increased business activity in the city. According to Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)-Cotabato City officer-in-charge Danilo Buenbrazo, the agency's small and medium-scale entreprise (SME) development plan focuses on improving the business incentive code and the business licensing process. It also seeks to promote competitiveness by introducing new business systems such as franchising, as well as strengthen business organizations.

"The plan also seeks to improve on existing business policies by providing by providing incentives for information and communication technology (ICT)-related and big-ticket investments," Buenbrazo adds.